

VZCZCXRO0902
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #1047/01 2001419
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 181419Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2511
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2619
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2895
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001047

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S SILVERBERG AND PDAS WARLICK
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/KUMAR/PHEE
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/17/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: OPPOSITION DRUZE ADVISOR: WE WILL WIN
2009 ELECTIONS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. William K. Grant for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[¶1.](#) (C) Marwan Abu Fadel, senior advisor to opposition Druze figure Minister Talal Arslan, doubts President Michel Sleiman will successfully form his own parliamentary bloc for the 2009 election. He also does not believe the appointment by March 14 of independent Shia Minister Ibrahim Shamseddine will be able to draw Shia support away from his nominal opposition allies, the Shia groups Hizballah and Amal. He is confident the opposition will become the majority after the 2009 parliamentary elections, and wonders what kinds of deals Druze rivals Arslan and Walid Jumblatt will make in the run-up to the elections. End summary.

EFFORTS TO FORM A
PRESIDENTIAL BLOC
WILL FAIL

[¶2.](#) (C) PolOff and Senior LES Political Advisor met July 15 with Marwan Abu Fadel, a senior advisor to the newly-appointed Minister of Youth and Sports Talal Arslan, an opposition Druze leader. Abu Fadel claimed that the efforts by some within March 14 to push for the formation of a parliamentary bloc aligned with President Michel Sleiman will fail. He said attempts to shift Christian votes from opposition Christian leader Michel Aoun to Sleiman will be unsuccessful, if Sleiman even forms a bloc, a move which Abu Fadel doubted.

OPPOSITION WILL BE
THE NEXT MAJORITY

[¶3.](#) (C) Instead, Abu Fadel confidently predicted, the opposition will secure 70 of the 128 parliamentary seats in the 2009 parliamentary elections. Abu Fadel added that he does not anticipate political boss MP Michel Murr will re-align with Aoun. Murr will, however, preserve his relationship with the Armenian Tashnaq party, he believed. Abu Fadel said that Aoun's fight for Christian rights prompted majority leader Saad Hariri to make important concessions to March 14 Christians in the cabinet formulation process in order to counterbalance Aoun's popularity.

SHAMSEDDINE AS MINISTER

WILL NOT DRAW SHIA AWAY
FROM HIZBALLAH/AMAL

¶4. (C) Abu Fadel added that the appointment of independent Shia Ibrahim Shamseddine as minister by March 14 will not break Hizballah and Amal's tight grip on the Shia community. He predicted, however, that the outcome of elections in the Chouf, the Druze stronghold, depends significantly on "what kind of deals" Jumblatt will make with his rival Arslan, noting that it is too soon to predict what will happen between them.

OPPOSITION DRUZE CLOSE
TO HIZBALLAH

¶5. (C) A still-bitter Abu Fadel attributed his own loss in the 2005 parliamentary elections to an action by Hizballah, but said he nevertheless feels proud of Hizballah's achievements in the Arab/Israeli struggle. When asked, Abu Fadel said that Arslan meets regularly with Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah. Abu Fadel disclosed that if Arslan were to disagree with a position of Hizballah's, he would privately meet with Nasrallah, but would refrain from any public disagreement.

URGES PROPORTIONAL
REPRESENTATION

BEIRUT 00001047 002 OF 002

¶6. (C) Abu Fadel advocated an electoral law based on proportional representation, believing such a system would facilitate the emergence of new political figures. According to Abu Fadel, the current system is archaic and does not fulfill the people's will. Concluding that the reforms stipulated in the Boutros draft law are generally good, he expressed skepticism that electoral financing reforms could be realized. He explained, "It is extremely difficult to monitor the flow of money in these elections."

EMBASSY SHOULD WORK
WITH OPPOSITION MORE

¶7. (C) Abu Fadel suggested the U.S. Embassy reposition itself in the wake of newly-formed cabinet. Perceiving that the Embassy devotes more time meeting with March 14 figures, he recommended it enlarge its contact base to include more regular communication with opposition figures, especially those that have just joined the government.
GRANT